

Conflicts can flare up in resource-rich areas: Walhi

The Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) warned the government that social unrest may arise from natural resource conflicts in 2012 if the government refuses to "listen to the people".

Walhi's executive director, Berry Nahdian Forqan, said that conflicts over natural resources would get worse in 11 provinces, particularly in areas with abundant natural resources, including mining and oil palm plantations, such as in North Sumatra and Jambi.

"People are more aware of their rights. They are getting braver to fight for their rights against repressive authority. This can lead to an uncontrollable social unrest if the government refuses to listen to their voices," said Berry.

He added that the government should also review regulations that could trigger conflicts, such as the law on land acquisition, which "allows the government to rob people's land in the name of economic growth".

Walhi recorded 103 conflicts over natural resources, of which 28.44 percent relating to forestry, 26.47 percent to oil palm plantations, and 24.51 percent to mining.

The latest fatalities came from conflicts related to natural resources which broke out in Mesuji, in the province of Lampung, Sumatra and in Bima in the province of West Nusa Tenggara.

While controversy regarding footages of the incidents in Lampung remains, such conflicts could be prevented if the government is willing to listen to the aspirations of the local population.

Meanwhile, the National Police have named five police officers as suspects in the recent incident at Bima, which claimed the lives of three protesters.

"The number of suspects can increase," National Police internal affairs division head Brig. Gen. Budi Wasesa said as quoted by detik.com on Saturday.

He said police were still investigating the case, and are particularly focused on finding the bullets that were used by the police officers to shoot the victims in the Bima incident.

"We have seized the suspects' weapons but we need to find the projectile," he said.

Budi added police also possessed video evidence showing the suspects hitting protesters.